WHAT IS CLAIMED IS:

1. **(Currently amended)** A method of processing payment transactions by a financial institution having a plurality of branches, each payment transaction having a destination bank and each payment transaction being capable of being forwarded through a plurality of clearing systems, the method comprising the steps of:

transmitting the payment transactions from the plurality of branches to a central location within the financial institution, the central location being connected to the plurality of clearing systems;

determining, by a payment router, for each payment transaction, an appropriate clearing system which to forward the payment transaction; ~~and~~

forwarding each payment transaction to a flow control module; and

checking each payment transaction based on parameters of the payment transaction by the flow control module before releasing each payment transaction to the determined appropriate clearing system.

2. (Original) The method as recited in claim 1, further comprising the step of designating a preferred clearing system for one of the payment transactions, and wherein the step of determining the appropriate clearing system considers the preferred clearing system.

3. (Original) The method as recited in claim 2, further comprising the step of determining if the preferred clearing system is available for use.

4. (Original) The method as recited in claim 2, further comprising the step of determining if the preferred clearing system is on holiday.

5. (Original) The method as recited in claim 2, further comprising the step of determining if a cutoff time for using the preferred clearing system has passed.

6. (Original) The method as recited in claim 1, wherein the plurality of clearing systems include Real Time Gross Settlement (RTGS) clearing systems, and Multi-Lateral Net Settlement (MLNS) clearing systems, and wherein the RTGS clearing systems can further use a Trans-European Automated Real-Time Gross settlement Express Transfer (TARGET) clearing system.

7. (**Currently amended**) The method as recited in claim 1, wherein the step of processing each payment transaction by the flow control module~~determining the appropriate clearing system~~ further comprises the step of determining if ~~the step of forwarding~~ the payment transaction would exceed a predetermined limit.

8. (**Currently amended**) The method as recited in claim 7, wherein the predetermined limit is set with ~~set~~ respect to the destination bank.

9. (Original) The method as recited in claim 7, wherein the predetermined limit is set with respect to a proposed clearing system being considered for the appropriate clearing system.

10. (**Currently amended**) A method of processing a payment transaction, the payment transaction having a destination bank and the payment

transaction being capable of being forwarded through a plurality of clearing systems, the method comprising the steps of:

(a) identifying candidate clearing systems which could be used to forward the payment transaction to the destination bank;

(b) verifying, by a payment router, that a first candidate clearing system is available for use;

(c) verifying, by a flow control module, that a processing of the payment transaction does not exceed a predetermined value limit; and

(d) forwarding the payment transaction to the first candidate clearing system.

11. (Original) The method as recited in claim 10, further comprising the steps of:

sequentially repeating steps (b) and (c) for other candidate clearing systems until one of the other candidate clearing systems satisfies the verification steps of (b) and (c); and

forwarding the payment transaction to the one other candidate clearing system.

12. (Original) The method as recited in claim 11, further comprising the step of manually routing the payment transaction if none of the candidate clearing systems satisfy the verification of either steps (b) or (c).

13. (Original) The method as recited in claim 10, further comprising the step of prioritizing the candidate clearing systems.

14. (Original) The method as recited in claim 13, wherein the step of prioritizing further comprises the step of giving higher priority to a candidate clearing system identified by a customer as a preferred clearing system.

15. (Original) The method as recited in claim 10, further comprising the step of determining if the destination bank is a member of more than one clearing system.

16. (Original) The method as recited in claim 15, wherein the destination bank is a member of only the first candidate clearing system, the method further comprising the step of manually routing the payment transaction if the verification of either steps (b) or (c) fail.

17. (Original) The method as recited in claim 10, wherein the Trans-European Automated Real-Time Gross settlement Express Transfer (TARGET) is designated as a desired clearing system, the method further comprising the step of eliminating candidate clearing systems which are not Real Time Gross Settlement (RTGS) clearing systems.

18. (Original) The method as recited in claim 10, wherein the verification of step (b) further comprises the step of determining if the candidate clearing system is operational.

19. (Original) The method as recited in claim 10, wherein the verification of step (b) further comprises the step of determining if the candidate clearing system is on holiday.

20. (Original) The method as recited in claim 10, wherein the verification of step (b) further comprises the step of determining if a cutoff time for using the candidate clearing system has passed.

21. (Original) The method as recited in claim 10, wherein the predetermined value limit is set with respect to the destination bank.

22. (Previously presented) The method as recited in claim 10, wherein the predetermined value limit is a limit of debits accepted by the destination bank.

23. (Original) The method as recited in claim 10, wherein the predetermined value limit is set with respect to the first candidate clearing system.

24. (Original) The method as recited in claim 23, wherein the predetermined value limit is a limit of debits accepted by the first candidate clearing system.

25. **(Currently amended)** A method of processing payment transactions by a financial institution having a plurality of branches, each payment transaction having a destination bank and each payment transaction being capable of being forwarded through a plurality of clearing systems, the method comprising the steps of :

transmitting the payment transactions from the plurality of branches to a central location within the financial institution;

for each payment transaction, determine an appropriate clearing system which to forward the payment transaction by:

(a) identifying, for each payment transaction, candidate clearing systems which could be used to forward the payment transaction to the destination bank;

(b) verifying, at a payment router, that a first candidate clearing system is available for use, and

(c) verifying, at a flow control module, that a processing of the payment transaction does not exceed a predetermined value limit; and

forwarding each payment transaction to the determined appropriate clearing system.

26. (Previously presented) A system for processing payment transactions by a financial institution the system comprising

a plurality of branches of the financial institution, at least one branch generating payment transactions, each payment transaction having a destination bank and each payment transaction being capable of being forwarded through a plurality of clearing systems;

a central location within the financial institution, the at least one branch transmitting the payment transactions to the central location; and

a payment router within the central location, the payment router determining, for each payment transaction, an appropriate clearing system to which each payment transaction should be forwarded, and the payment router forwarding each payment transaction to the determined appropriate clearing system.

27. (Original) The system as recited in claims 26, wherein the plurality of clearing systems include Real Time Gross Settlement (RTGS) clearing systems, and Multi-lateral Net Settlement (MLNS) clearing systems, and wherein the RGGS clearing systems can further use a Trans-European Automated Real-Time Gross settlement Express Transfer (TARGET) clearing system.

28. (Previously presented) The system as recited in claim 26, further comprising a flow control module coupled to the payment router, wherein the flow control module determines if the forwarding of the payment transaction by the payment router would exceed a predetermined limit.

29. (Original) The system as recited in claims 28, wherein the predetermined limit is set with respect to the destination bank.

30. (Original) The system as recited in claim 29, wherein the predetermined value limit is a limit of debits accepted by the destination bank.

31. (Original) The system as recited in claim 28, wherein the predetermined limit is set with respect to a proposed clearing system.

32. (Original) The system as recited in claim 31, wherein the predetermined value limit is a limit of debits accepted by the proposed clearing system.

33. (Original) The system as recited in claim 26, wherein the payment router (170, 250) determines if the destination bank is a member of more than one clearing system.

34. (Previously presented) The system as recited in claim 26, wherein the payment router identifies candidate clearing systems which could be used to forward the payment transaction to the destination bank and wherein the payment router verifies that a first candidate clearing system is available for use.

35. (Previously presented) The system as recited in claim 34, wherein the payment router determines if the candidate clearing system is on holiday.

36. (Previously presented) The system as recited in claim 34, wherein the payment router determines if a cutoff time for using the candidate clearing system has passed.

37. (Previously presented) The system as recited in claim 34, wherein if the first candidate clearing system is not available for use, the payment router further verifying at least one of the other candidate clearing systems is available for use.

38. (Previously presented) The system as recited in claim 37, wherein the payment router manually routes the payment transaction if one of the candidate clearing systems are available for use.

39. (Previously presented) The system as recited in claim 34, wherein the payment router prioritizes the candidate clearing systems.

40. (Previously presented) The system as recited in claim 39, wherein the payment router gives higher priority to a candidate clearing system identified by a customer as a preferred clearing system.

41. (Previously presented) The system as recited in claim 34, wherein if the first candidate clearing system is not available for use, the payment router further verifying at least one of the other candidate clearing systems is available for use, and the payment router manually routes the payment transaction if one of the candidate clearing systems are available for use; and

the payment router prioritizes the candidate clearing systems, the payment router giving higher priority to a candidate clearing system identified by a customer as a preferred clearing system.

42. (New) The system as recited in claim 1, wherein each of the plurality of clearing systems is associated with a clearing channel respectively and each clearing channel is connected to the central location, wherein the determining, by a payment router, for each payment transaction, an appropriate clearing system which to forward the payment transaction further comprises consulting a clearing member details table to check that to which clearing channel the destination bank is connected to.

43. (New) The system as recited in claim 42, wherein the determining, by a payment router, for each payment transaction, an appropriate clearing system which to forward the payment transaction further comprises consulting a clearing channel table to check status of all clearing channels the central location is connected to.

44. (New) The system as recited in claims 43, wherein the clearing channel table contains a default priority for each clearing channel.

45. (New) The system as recited in claims 44, wherein the clearing member details table contains an overriding priority for each clearing channel.

46. (New) The system as recited in claims 45, wherein the determining, by a payment router, for each payment transaction, an appropriate clearing system which to forward the payment transaction further comprises using the overriding priority in the clearing member details table to override the default priority in the clearing channel table.

47. (New) The system as recited in claim 43, wherein the clearing member details table identifies each bank by a universal Society for World-Wide Inter-bank Financial Telecommunications (SWIFT) code.